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No. 156.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers.

NEW YORK.

31 Rose St., N. Y. P. O. Box 2734.

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## OR, THE RACE FOR LIFE.

BY P. J. HIGGINS.

CHAPTER I.

POPPING THE QUESTION.

Miss Lilian Balsodare had a beautiful face, a graceful, elegant figure, a dash of poetry in her nature, and a warm, sympathetic heart in her bosom. The sun was setting upon her twenty-second birthday, and it was one of the happiest in her existence.

"CUT IT SHORT, MR. UPPERCRUST!" SAID THE LEADER, SARCASTICALLY. "LAWYER'S GAB DON'T COUNT NOTHIN' HERE, AN' ALL THE DUST IN THE BLACK HILLS CAN'T SAVE YE NOW!"



She was the only daughter of Nelson Balsodare, a well-to-do farmer of Belvidere. Contrary to the rule in cases of "only daughters," she was neither petted nor spoiled. Although she had a way and a will of her own when occasion required, she was neither wayward nor obstinate, thanks to the sweet disposition she inherited from a virtuous and affectionate mother.

As a matter of course, Miss Lilian had a lover—most young ladies have at twenty-two, if not before. She was almost worshiped by a clever and fascinating young gentleman of good repute—the only son of a wealthy farmer in the vicinity. This secret, hidden carefully away in the depths of her innocent bosom, was enjoyed with the keen zest and lively emotion with which ardent youth embraces the first advances of the tender passion.

It was a rare sunset of a June day. Lilian had strayed alone into the orchard, and had thrown herself wearily down to rest upon a mossy bank beside a magnificent clump of ferns. She wore a dress of soft and fleecy white. One long, silken curl had escaped from its confinement, and strayed across the smooth, broad brow in restless defiance. The foot and instep, unconsciously permitted to stray beyond the sacred precincts of the skirt, was of fine, classic mold; even a Canova could not find it in her heart to criticise its symmetry and proportions.

The long eyelashes droop. A dreamy light steals into the eyes from depths unfathomable. The fair, shapely hands, little by little, fold across her lap, and she falls into deep reverie. A pleasant reverie, indeed, for ever and anon a dainty smile twitches the ruby lips and plays around the corners of the sweetest of little mouths.

But the muffled tramp of approaching footsteps at length arouses her, shattering into nothingness her charming *chateaux en Espagne*. She rises hastily.

A well-known face, and a familiar greeting. It is only Allan Blackmore, and she nonchalantly resumes her position.

"Good-evening, Miss Lilian! A rare good fortune to meet you thus alone."

He seated himself upon a fallen tree beside her. There was a woe-begone expression in his face.

"I was tired of the noise and gayety of the house," she said, simply, "and stole out here to rest."

"I trust I find you excellently well," he said, politely. "As usual, you are looking bewitchingly lovely."

"Thank you, Mr. Blackmore; I am very well, indeed."

"It is so very long since I had an opportunity of presenting you my good wishes in person that I hope you will pardon my presumption. I could not resist the temptation."

"It is a great kindness," she returned, sadly. "I fear I shall never be able to repay it."

A shade of disappointment clouded for an instant his dark yet handsome face, and a cold, hard light flashed from his restless eyes.

"Lilian," he said, in a hoarse and broken voice, betraying deep emotion. "Lilian, listen to me patiently. It may be the last time I shall have the pleasure of addressing you." He paused; an awkward silence ensued, and Miss Lilian felt her fluttering heart throb painfully as it seemed to rise into her throat.

"I shall listen patiently, Allan," she said, with a great but unsuccessful effort to appear at ease. She knew and dreaded what was coming.

"I cannot rest," he began, in deeply despondent tones. "For me there is no peace; asleep or awake, at home or abroad, alone or in society, it is all the same. Everywhere I turn your sweet face haunts me, Lilian; your witching eyes are piercing into mine. I am very, very unhappy. Life is one unceasing torment without your presence, and I can't endure it longer."

"I am very sorry for your sake, Allan—very sorry. It is, indeed, unfortunate."

"Oh, is there no hope for me, however faint, however slight?" he asked, passionately. "'Tis said that even the hardest heart may relent in time. Think of what I would endure—what I would sacrifice for your sake. Demand any proof of my sincerity, impose any condition, ask any sacrifice, only leave me one ray of hope, no matter how dim or distant, and I am happy."

"I have decided, and you already know my decision.

It is irrevocable." Slowly and solemnly the words were spoken. "Why seek to avert the inevitable?" she continued. "You can easily win the hand of one who would make you a better wife, and with whom you would be happier—far happier—than with me."

"Never, Lilian, never! For me you are the inevitable, and it is useless for me to contend against my fate. I tried it;" and he shuddered at the recollection; "the struggle was long and bitter, but I failed—completely and utterly failed. Do not ask me to give you up, Lilian; it is out of the question."

"It is very unfortunate," she repeated; but there was less coldness in the tone, and the severity of her expression relaxed somewhat, though she had not the courage to look him in the face. "I dare not hold out false hopes," she continued, "that would be criminal. I do not love you, and I can never love you!"

"Ah, Miss Lilian," retorted the young man, his tone of supplianee changing to one of pique, "I understand it all. You love another, and that is why you spurn the rich and undivided stream of affection I pour at your feet. Therefore it is that you trample upon it disdainfully. In brief, I love Miss Lilian, and Miss Lilian loves Chester Welford—"

The young lady flushed crimson from chin to temple, and betrayed great agitation.

"And Chester Welford loves another, my pretty Miss Lilian," he went on; "and your case is just as hopeless as my own. Ha, ha!"

There was a gleam of malignant triumph in his eyes as he pointed his forefinger mockingly in her now upturned face.

Miss Balsodare gasped for breath. Her heart sank within her bosom, down—down—then bounded again into her throat, as if to threaten her with suffocation. Her sight grew dim, and instinctively she seized an overhanging bough to save herself from falling prostrate on the turf.

"Chester Welford loves another!" Her death-knell could not affect her more profoundly.

"You have my sympathy," he said, tauntingly. "You will soon be better able to understand and realize the misery I feel. Ha, ha! Miss Lilian, you have my sympathy, but we are equally unfortunate."

And he laughed, a sneering, bitter, mocking laugh.

But the young lady is at length aroused, and rising to her feet she turns upon him with a flash of indignation in her gaze.

"Sir, I respect Mr. Welford"—she spoke with a haughty dignity—"and I must ask by what right you take such liberties with his name?"

Her first impulse was to arise hastily and return to the house. She would thus terminate a disagreeable and painful interview. But jealousy—that subtle and universal passion of the sensitive heart of woman—was now fully aroused; and she would fain learn her rival's name, and to what extent her secretly cherished hopes were endangered. By masked and skillful parleying she would, if possible, learn the particulars without betraying the absorbing interest she felt therein.

"I have a right to take liberties with anybody, or anything, when your happiness is at stake, Lilian," was the cool response. "In such a case I would always take the liberty without at all troubling myself about the right. What claim has any one upon your affection when he gives not his own undivided love in return?" he asked, abruptly.

The color in her cheek flushed and vanished in quick succession. He could see his insinuation had taken effect. He had succeeded in arousing doubt and suspicion in her mind and heart, and the victory was already half won. Chester Welford, and he alone, stood between him and the summit of earthly happiness. He would follow up his advantage.

"I will not ask you to believe my word," he whispered, with a malicious smile. "I will give you an opportunity of judging for yourself. But pardon me—perhaps you would prefer trusting blindly to the end. If so—"

"Proceed, and finish what you have to say," she said, eagerly. "Henceforth we may meet as strangers."



"Not as strangers, dear Lilian. Oh, no; not as strangers, I hope! But to the point. I will be brief:

"You have met Miss Edgeworth, now visiting at Church's? No? Then she knows every seam in your dress, every line of your features. Welford formed her acquaintance last summer, at Newport. She became infatuated—he infatuates every one, it seems—and that is the secret of her visit here. She leaves in a few days for Atlantic City; and I understand he is to follow soon after. One of her letters to him has fallen into my hands, and it is at your service."

"Excuse me, now, Mr. Blackmore," pleaded the young lady, faint, and sick at heart. "I have heard enough for to-day. I must return to the house. If I wish to hold any further communication with you I will let you know."

He attempted to raise the fair hand to his lips, but she repulsed him with a gesture of disdain, rising hastily to her feet. As she did so there was a rustle and a noise, as of something falling from the folds of her dress into the thick and tufted grass beneath. She was about to turn hurriedly away, when he again grasped the hand he had so suddenly released, exclaiming, in a broken voice:

"One moment, dear Lilian! If you should find full and clear proof of Welford's duplicity——"

"In any event we can never be but friends," she returned, impatiently. "Anything else is utterly impossible!"

"Oh, Heaven!" he gasped, "is that your final answer?"

"It is—final and irrevocable. Please excuse me. I must go!"

"So—and Welford has won at last? By ——! you will yet bitterly regret it. Go, Miss Balsodare! You will yet discover the worthlessness of your choice, and also realize that you cannot snub Allan Blackmore with impunity. Farewell; but we shall meet again, and under very different circumstances. It may come your turn to supplicate. Adieu, Miss Lilian!"

And, with a scornful smile upon his dark and handsome face, he bounded lightly over the fence, and was soon out of sight.

There were those in the village who remarked, when they learned that Allan Blackmore had in Chester Welford a successful rival, that "Belvidere would soon become too narrow for them both." They hinted mysteriously that some fine morning either one or the other would be missing, and further, that in all probability the missing man would be Chester Welford.

In less than two weeks afterward the quiet, conservative village of Belvidere awoke one fine morning to the enjoyment of a first-class sensation.

## CHAPTER II.

### FOUND—A CORPSE!

Allan Blackmore was reported missing.

Lilian drew a sigh of relief. She had no doubt he had left for parts unknown, and it was very probable he would never return. She was now happily rid of his importunity.

But Mr. Blackmore had given no hint of his intention to his mother or sisters, and they were in tears at his unexpected and mysterious disappearance.

Anxious and diligent inquiry soon elicited the information that when last seen in the village he was going in the direction of Farmer Balsodare's. It was nearly dusk when he was met by an acquaintance—Richard Walton—near Beech Grove, about half a mile from the farm-house. It had leaked out, however, that Miss Balsodare had rejected him; and on that account it was the general impression in the village that he had quietly started upon an extended tour, in order to drown his disappointment and mortification in the forgetfulness incident to foreign scene and clime.

But five days afterward a dead body was discovered in Beech Grove, not far from the spot where Allan Blackmore had last been seen by Richard Walton. The corpse lay upon its face; there were blood-stains upon the moss and dried leaves beneath, and clotted blood upon the stained and rumpled dress-coat. A silk handkerchief was tightly knotted around the neck, and upon a stout, overhanging bough there were marks and scratches as if something had

been tied thereon. Leading to where the corpse lay were traces as of a heavy body having been dragged over the soft earth and fallen leaves.

The news spread with incredible rapidity; and in a few minutes a crowd had collected around the spot, but no one as yet was bold enough to touch the body, or even approach very near. Some one thought the dress looked very much like that worn by Allan Blackmore the evening of his disappearance, and soon the news spread that the missing gentleman had committed suicide by hanging in Beech Grove.

Most of the young people who heard the news turned pale, uttered a prolonged "oh!" and, in the next breath, exclaimed:

"It's Lilian Balsodare! I knew something awful was sure to happen before the affair was ended."

Not a few added in severe tones:

"She ought to be ashamed of herself, the heartless thing!"

But around that dead body in the woods the crowd continued to increase.

"See who it is!" cried one.

"Better not," returned another, "until the coroner comes. Sleppy's boy has gone to notify him, and he'll be here directly."

"It isn't Allan Blackmore either," said a third, "Allan is not so stout as that."

"Don't ye know corpses swell up, ye galoot?" queried the first speaker, contemptuously. "That's Allan Blackmore, sure as you're livin'. Poor fellow! I thought he couldn't stand it. The disappointment was too much for him."

The coroner soon arrived. A jury was selected and sworn; the corpse was examined, and the clothing searched. The handkerchief around the neck had the initials "A. B." worked with blue silk in the corner. In the pockets several letters were found addressed to Allan Blackmore, and one ready to mail, with Miss Balsodare's name and address upon the envelope, ran thus:

"DEAR LILIAN.—My heart is broken. I have given up all hope! You will never hear from me again, for I shall leave to-night for the Territories, never to return. You may yet learn the depth and the value of the love you have so rudely trampled upon; you may yet realize the anguish of the heart that loves, and loves in vain.

"Farewell forever more!

ALLAN."

The jury held but a brief session. The principal witness was Richard Walton, an intimate friend of the deceased. The substance of his testimony was that he met Mr. Blackmore on the evening of the twelfth of June, not fifty rods from where the body was found. He took the jury to the spot. He exchanged a few pleasant words with him, he said, and then passed on his way to the village. There was nothing about his air or manner to indicate his premeditation of so terrible a deed.

Aside from the swelling and discoloration of the face and body, the only marks of violence apparent were a few scratches on the face and hands, and a slight cut—little more than a scratch—beneath the right shoulder-blade, from which some blood had oozed, staining and matting a portion of the underclothing.

The marks upon the bough beneath which the body was found were closely examined, and a shred of silk discovered of the same hue as the handkerchief. The inference that deceased had hanged himself to this bough was irresistible, and that during the death-struggle the handkerchief had given way, and the dying man in his contortions had scratched himself, and stained his clothing.

A motive for the rash act was not wanting, for it was no secret that Allan Blackmore had long and ardently sought the hand of Miss Balsodare, and that some days previous he had been rejected.

Up to this time the tragedy was carefully concealed from the Blackmore family; but now a relative was dispatched to break the sad tidings as gently as possible. The grief of the widowed mother was truly heart-rending, while the wailing of her daughters would touch the stoniest heart. They would at once have rushed to the grove had they not been firmly restrained by the gentle hands of sympathizing friends.

In order to spare the feelings of the bereaved mother, the



jury adjourned to her residence, where her testimony was privately taken, as also that of her daughters.

Under the circumstances it was not deemed necessary to hold a post mortem examination of the body, and the verdict that "Allan Blackmore had come to his death by strangulation from hanging, performed by his own hands," was agreed to unanimously.

When the result of the inquest was made known to Mrs. Blackmore she exclaimed:

"My poor, poor boy! May Heaven forgive her, the cruel, heartless girl! Though it's very hard for me to say it, may Heaven forgive her the wrong she has done my poor Allan!"

But Lilly, Allan's youngest sister, refused point-blank to believe in the suicide theory.

"Oh, mother," she would sob, over and over again, as she buried her face in her mother's bosom, "Allan never did such a deed!—he would never do such a thing! He never, never did! Some one killed poor Allan, mother! He would never kill himself—no, not even for Lilian! Oh, dear!" she would repeat, "some wicked man killed my poor brother—my only brother! Oh, dear!"

The undertaker was called, and within an hour the corpse was coffined and removed to the Blackmore residence. Putrefaction had already set in, and notwithstanding the free use of ice and disinfectants, the odor was so unpleasant as to render the opening of the ice box unadvisable.

The features were so changed and distorted that even Mrs. Blackmore could hardly recognize them. But there upon the table were the little trinkets he usually carried about him, there were his pencil-case, gold watch, card-case, and letters—indubitable proofs of the identity of the lifeless clay within.

Late that night a folded paper was flung through the open window by some unseen hand, and fell at Mrs. Blackmore's feet. Upon it was hastily written, in pencil:

"MRS. BLACKMORE:—Your son Allan did not fall by his own hand. There has been foul play in the case. Have the body examined, and set a detective at work."  
ONE WHO KNOWS."

This was a great relief to the heart-broken mother. Her Allan—Heaven be thanked—was not a suicide after all!

To lose her only son was a terrible and crushing calamity, but that he should have died by his own hand was far more bitter than death.

"The brain does not seem engorged," said Dr. Yale, one of the physicians who were conducting the post-mortem. "A fair proof that death did not result from hanging—eh?"

"So I take it," returned the other, a young man who was recently graduated.

"What did it result from, then?" queried the elderly gentleman, impatiently.

"That remains to be seen," coolly responded Dr. Knapp. "Be careful you do not scratch your fingers, or you are a dead man. If you get them poisoned it will be just the same as signing your death-warrant."

"Heart is healthy—valves normal," observed the elder. "The case is growing mysterious. Shall we look for evidences of poisoning?"

The other nodded assent.

After a long and patient search there were no traces of poison of any kind to be found.

"The lungs seem perfectly healthy, but how account for all this blood in the right pleural cavity?" asked Dr. Knapp, excitedly. "Blood-vessel burst?—but such an unusual situation!—or else—What's this?"

"Pooh! only a scratch," indifferently returned his companion.

"Please hand me that probe."

After a few seconds a cry of joy and surprise burst from the young man's lips.

"Eureka!" exclaimed he; "I have struck a foreign body. The mystery is explained; it is a stab-wound. Innocent as it looks, it cost Allan Blackmore his life."

In a few minutes they succeeded in extracting from the wound a piece of steel nearly an inch and a half in length. On washing it, lo! it was the blade of a pocket-knife!

"A cowardly, dastardly deed!" said Dr. Yale, with clenched teeth—"to creep up behind a man in the dark and stab him in the back! It was a foul murder! The

assassin used the handkerchief to quiet his victim's cries perhaps, at first, and then to drag the body from the path."

"It appears he was struck with considerable force," observed his companion, "when it was sufficient to break so stout a blade as this."

"Ha!" exclaimed the other, closely examining the fatal blade; "here is a name written upon it. Heaven and earth! look at that!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### ARRESTED.

Yes, there was a name neatly engraved upon that blood-stained blade—a name that carried with it strong presumptive evidence of guilt.

"C. Welford"—that was all, but that was quite enough. He was Allan Blackmore's rival—what need was there to say more?

The news of the finding of the broken knife-blade spread rapidly, and caused a profound sensation. In half an hour the usual quiet and peaceful village was a scene of the wildest excitement. People at once divided into two parties—one immediately convicting Mr. Welford of the foul deed, in their own judgment, notwithstanding his hitherto unblemished reputation—the other as stoutly maintaining his innocence.

Chester Welford was superintendent of a local manufacturing company, and had just returned that evening from a business trip to the Empire City. News of the Blackmore tragedy was the first he heard after stepping upon the platform. He betrayed great agitation; his color came and went; he gasped for breath, and it was some minutes before he was able to speak.

"The poor, foolish fellow!" was all he said; but it was evident from his manner that public sentiment would hold him accountable, at least in part, for Mr. Blackmore's desperate deed. He ate no supper that evening, and under pretense of feeling more fatigued than usual after his journey, retired early, but not to sleep. All night long his restless head tossed upon the pillows, and morning dawned ere his weary eyelids closed in fitful slumber.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Silas Fint, the constable, called at Farmer Welford's, and requested an interview with "Ches," as the young man was popularly called. He was looking rather grave.

"That's a shocking affair they've had over at Blackmore's," observed Mr. Fint, very sadly. "It makes my blood run cold."

"Terrible! terrible!" returned the young man, abstractedly. "I haven't yet recovered from the shock. It was the first news I heard after stepping off the cars yesterday. I didn't sleep all night long from thinking of it."

"Ah!" sighed Mr. Fint, and the sadness and gravity of his countenance deepened.

"I never thought Allen would do such a thing in his sober senses," continued Mr. Welford; "he was so full of life and health. What will his poor mother and sisters do! It must be a crushing blow to them."

Mr. Fint looked him sharply in the face.

"It is, indeed," he said; "and Mrs. Blackmore may not survive it. However, she does not feel quite so badly as at first. You know it was at first supposed he had committed suicide?"

"I understood such was the verdict of the coroner's jury," was the quiet response. "What motives have you heard assigned for the rash deed?"

He wished to know if Lilian's rejection of Mr. Blackmore had been connected with the tragedy, and also whether he himself had not come in for his share of the odium.

"Oh, the suicide theory is now abandoned," replied the constable. "Have you not heard of the post mortem?"

"No; I have not been out to-day. I have been feeling so tired and fatigued. When did it take place?"

"Yesterday forenoon. The doctors found he was stabbed in the back, and concluded that the handkerchief must a' been tied round the neck by the assassin in order to draw the body from the path where the deed was done."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Mr. Welford. Fint observed him



narrowly. "What a brutal, cowardly deed! To stab him in the back—perhaps before he had any intimation of danger! I wonder how any man with a human heart in his bosom could do it?"

"There are several ugly rumors and suspicions flying round already," Mr. Fint observed, his tone gradually becoming formal and official; "and it is expected the criminal will soon be unearthed. I suppose, though, he has taken time by the forelock and cleared—'dug out,' as they say, or, as an Irishman would put it, 'taken leg-bail.' He's had time enough. The innocent man is always suspected first, it appears."

"They should set one of Pinkerton's detectives to work, and use every exertion to hunt down the criminal. I think some steps should be taken toward offering a reward. No time should be lost. Had Mr. Blackmore any money about him the evening of his——"

"As I say, the innocent man is always suspected first," repeated the constable, impatiently. "I'm sorry, Ches, but the fact is, strange as it may appear, that Mrs. Blackmore's suspicions have fallen upon—yourself!"

"Mrs. Blackmore suspects me?—suspects I killed Allan? Fint, I believe you would attempt to have a joke at the expense of Death himself, if he were just about to take you in his clutches. But it won't do. You can't scare——"

"I'm afraid you'll find it no joke," said Fint, with a grave shake of the head. "Just look at that once," and he handed him a folded paper. It was a warrant for his arrest, sworn out by Mrs. Blackmore, and signed by Squire Miller, an old friend and intimate acquaintance. "I'm dreadfully sorry, Ches," continued the constable. "It's a shame you should be treated so, and I told Mrs. Blackmore as much this morning."

"This is an infernal outrage!" exclaimed Mr. Welford, indignantly, as he set his teeth and crushed the paper in his clenched and nervous fingers.

"I wouldn't mind it, if I were you," said Fint, soothingly, now that his disagreeable duty was performed. "No one believes that you had any connection whatsoever with it. And on second thought it is much better for you to have the whole business thoroughly investigated; for, you see, the devil of it is, they found the knife-blade in Allan's body, and your name was written on it!"

"My name?" Surprise and terror were depicted on the young man's countenance.

"Yes; the blade of a pocket-knife, having engraved upon it, 'C. Welford,' and a clover-leaf."

"Oh, Heaven!"

With a tremulous groan Chester Welford staggered forward a step or two, and fell heavily to the floor.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh, Lilian, it's Chester—it's poor, dear Chester. He is arrested for killing Allan Blackmore. Oh, what a shame!" And Dora Richmond, Lilian's cousin and intimate companion, clasped her in a warm and sympathizing embrace.

"Dora, dear, do you believe he's guilty? Can it be possible?" There was unutterable anxiety and anguish in the question, and the tears rolled in large crystal drops down her pale and haggard cheeks.

"Lilian, love, it can't be possible," said Dora, encouragingly kissing away her tears as she spoke. "He must be innocent. At least let us hope so," added she, rather despondently.

"But, oh! I fear it is possible that Chester met him in the grove on that unlucky night, and they may have come to blows, for you know how passionate and quick-tempered Allan was! Yet Chester—so gentle and tender—would not kill even an insect—no, not even an insect, if he could avoid it. Why did they arrest him? What right had they to suspect him?"

"I suppose they thought because they were rivals——"

"Dora, Dora, what a miserable, unfortunate creature I am!" she exclaimed, with great bitterness. "I am the cause of it all—of it all!"

And she wrung her hands, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"We all thought he committed suicide," said Dora, in a tone of marked disappointment.

"Yes, yes!" quickly returned Lilian, eager to grasp at any supposition involving her lover's innocence. "It must be so; he must have taken his own life. Chester is inno-

cent—I know he must be innocent. But, alas, I am the cause of Allan's death! Oh, what shall I do?—what shall I do? I shall never, never see a happy day again!"

"But the doctors say he was stabbed in the back with a penknife," said Dora, speaking carelessly, trying to break the bad news as gently as possible, "and a piece of the blade broke off in the wound, and they found it there. Worse than all, 'tis said that Chester's name is written on it."

"It's false!" shrieked Lilian, starting up. "He gave me that very knife more than a week ago, and I have had it in my possession ever since!"

And she searched hastily for it, at first in her skirt pocket, and then in the little drawer of her bureau, where she kept her trinkets and letters carefully locked away.

But no penknife was to be found.

A horrible suspicion flashed through her mind.

"Oh, I have lost it—or else given it back, I don't know which! Oh, merciful Lord!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### A FATAL TELL-TALE.

When Chester Welford was arrested he was taken before Squire Miller, an elderly gentleman who for many years had dispensed the law to the people of Belvidere with strict and even-handed justice. It must be observed of the good old gentleman, however, that his judgments and decisions were generally based upon the spirit of the law, rather than the letter thereof; and the smart lawyer or defendant who raised a technical point before him invariably came to grief, for the simple-minded old gentleman either could not or would not understand it.

He had filled out and signed the warrant for Chester Welford's arrest with unconcealed reluctance and disgust; and he would have refused to do so point-blank if the evidence were not of so pointed and damaging a character.

The hearing before the alderman was at once proceeded with. The finding of the dead body was testified to by the proper parties, and the clothes, watch, letters, etc., were produced and identified by Mrs. Blackmore and her daughters.

Doctor Knapp described the appearance of the body, pointed out the location of the wound, and recognized the broken blade which he had extracted therefrom.

Doctor Yale swore that the injury inflicted by the knife was the only serious one they had succeeded in finding, after a careful and thorough search. In his opinion it was the cause of death, and from the nature of the wound and its location he could not for a moment believe it could have been self-inflicted. It was between three and four inches of the spine, and just beneath the right shoulder-blade. The knife entered the body at right angles, and must have been struck squarely from behind, and with considerable force.

"Chester," said the squire, in a husky voice, "I must caution you to be very careful of what you say here, for it may be used against you. Do you wish to ask the witnesses any questions?"

"Thank you—no, Mr. Miller. I believe there is no occasion at present."

"Of course, your name being on this blade is the only circumstance that casts any suspicion upon you. It bears your name, but it may or may not be yours, for all we know."

He looked anxiously in the young man's face, as if to read there a disclaimer of the ownership. But the expression was blank and vacant.

"If there is no proof that this belonged to Mr. Welford," he said, addressing Mrs. Blackmore's counsel, and pointing to the blood-stained steel upon the table, "I shall feel bound to discharge him."

"I shall spare them that trouble," said Mr. Welford, with a sad and despondent expression. "The name is mine, and I am the owner."

The good old squire was thunderstruck, and not a little angry.

"The foolish fellow," he thought to himself, "I'm sure he's innocent; but he'll get the rope around his neck, at this rate, before he stops."

Then aloud, "Remember I cautioned you, sir," he said



in an official tone of severe dignity, "and I do so again. You make admissions in this court, sir, at your own risk!"

Squire Miller had quite a high opinion of the dignity of "his court;" and never looked so placidly imposing as when addressed "your honor." Indeed, it was slyly whispered by the village wag that a plaintiff could always count upon a judgment in his favor from the squire, if he only knew how to "your honor" him sufficiently.

"The truth can surely do me no harm, squire, and there is no use in denying it," returned the young man, with a ghastly smile. "There are three or four present who know it to be mine, and even if there were not I would not deny the ownership."

"So you admit this is yours?" asked Mr. Chisholm, holding up the piece of blood-stained steel, from which the accused turned away with a shudder.

"I have already done so, sir," was the frigid and haughty reply.

"Then, squire, we must ask you to commit Mr. Welford to the county prison, to await his trial for the willful murder of Allan Blackmore!"

A loud sobbing was heard in a corner of the room, and Chester turned his eyes anxiously in that direction. His youngest sister, Jenny, aged about twelve, was crying bitterly.

"But, Chester," urged the now excited squire, unconsciously losing all thought of the dignity of "his court," while he shuffled nervously his books and papers, "you surely must know how that knife left your possession, and also to whom you gave it?"

The ashen hue of death crept over the face of the accused, and even his lips became bloodless. He essayed to speak, but his voice failed him, while every eye in the room was fixed upon him with the gravest of misgivings.

"I am very sorry to say I must decline to answer that question," he said at length. "Do your duty, squire."

"Come, what bail do you require, Mr. Chisholm?" asked Mr. Miller, rising and placing his glasses close to his eyes in order to hide the tears that had begun to gather there. "I myself will go on Mr. Welford's bond for twenty thousand, if need be. Name your sum!"

"This is a serious case, squire, a very serious case; a case of willful, deliberate murder, squire—murder in the first degree, you are aware. 'Fast bind, fast find,' is my motto. I do not think from the damaging—ahem—I must say, from the almost conclusive proof adduced here this evening—and we have withheld testimony of still greater importance—I do not think, I repeat, that it is proper to admit the accused to bail—ahem."

"Tut, tut, man!" was the testy rejoinder. "I'd stake my head upon his innocence. And as to his running away, or jumping his bail—tut, Mr. Chisholm! The court will accept bail in the case of Blackmore against Welford in the sum of five thousand dollars. Here is a blank; fill it up. If you insist upon a greater sum you shall have it—a hundred thousand, if necessary. Proceed!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh, Chester!"

"Lilian, dearest. Oh, Lilian, Lilian!"

He approached, with arms extended, as if to fold her to his bosom, but the next instant turned sadly away, and tottered to a seat, for Miss Balsodare held up one fair hand in gesture of repulsion, and then hiding her face in her handkerchief, sobbed as if her heart were breaking. And it was, if keen anguish and an ocean of deepest, tenderest sympathy were sufficient to break a human heart.

"Oh, Lilian, that knife—that fatal knife! Tell me, for the love of Heaven!—let me know the worst—if——"

"Lilian, I forbid you!" and Mrs. Balsodare's stern voice was heard, as she entered the cozy parlor where Chester Welford had spent many a pleasant evening.

Lilian was lead from the room by her mother, who closed the door as soon as she crossed the threshold.

Mrs. Balsodare was an elderly lady, with a pleasant, open face, and hair thickly sprinkled with gray. She was an excellent woman, and a model wife. Personally she greatly respected Mr. Welford, and was well aware of her daughter's affection for him; but she had very strict notions of propriety, among them one that a young lady

should accept no attentions from a gentleman over whose head hung an indictment for murder.

"Mr. Welford," she began, gently, but seriously, "you have always been heartily welcome here, and Lilian and myself have always tried to make it pleasant for you. I am sorry to say that, owing to what has happened, I must ask you not to compromise my daughter's name by visiting here, or by seeking her company elsewhere. We will both believe you innocent as long as we can, and pray——"

"Oh, Mrs. Balsodare, is it possible Lilian believes that I am guilty?"

"To tell the truth, we do not know exactly what to believe," was the dubious reply. "We can only pray that it will be all cleared up in time. Some one is guilty. Allan Blackmore has been foully murdered. That much is a fact. However, I trust in the overruling hand of Providence that the innocent will not be made to suffer for the guilty."

"Still the innocent does sometimes suffer for the guilty, for all that," returned the young man, somewhat bitterly, adding, sadly and solemnly, "as I fear will happen in this case."

"Let us hope not, Mr. Welford."

"Mr. Welford!" Why not "Chester," as usual? Ah, this was the deepest stab, the keenest pang of all! We can easily steel our hearts against the slights and insults of those who are indifferent to us, but when we realize that we have fallen in the estimation of those we respect or love, our bruised hearts suffer in silence and agony too deep and excruciating for expression.

"If you were to know the truth, Mrs. Balsodare—but no, I dare not tell you. It would break my heart. For pity's sake—for Heaven's sake—suspend your judgment until the mystery is cleared up, if, alas! it ever will be. It may be that I shall have to suffer the full penalty of the law; but I am willing to die to save others. Please say this from me to Lilian—that should occasion require I have the moral and physical courage to die in order to save those who are dearer, far dearer, to me than life itself. Say that. And now good-by!"

## CHAPTER V.

### ON TRIAL.

The days and weeks went by, and the murder of Allan Blackmore had, generally speaking, ceased to be an interesting topic in Belvidere. Not so, however, to Lilian Balsodare; not so to Chester Welford—to whom these were interminable days and weeks of ceaseless doubt, anxiety, and misery.

Finding himself looked upon in the village with ill-concealed suspicion and distrust, and meeting with cold and averted looks, even among his most intimate acquaintances, he withdrew altogether from society, his only appearance in public being attendance at church upon the Sabbath, a duty he was punctual in performing. With the exception of a walk over the farm daily and an occasional stroll over the wooded hills beyond, he remained indoors, seated in the leather-covered arm chair by the parlor window, silent, gloomy, and dejected.

He grew pale and thin from day to day, and there were many who noted his appearance with the remark that if his trial were long delayed the accused would first appear before the Great Judge, from Whose decision there is no appeal. Even his own family wished the case disposed of as soon as possible, despite the vigorous protests of his counsel, who were most anxious for delay in the hope that public feeling would calm down in time, and some trace of the real murderer be discovered.

Detectives were constantly at work upon the case, and several times they came upon a clew from which they expected much—but in vain. Strange and mysterious as it may appear, it was nevertheless true, that Chester Welford, instead of rejoicing at the prospect of the discovery of the real murderer, manifested instead an unmistakable alarm—not to say terror. He seemed to have lost all interest and enjoyment in life, and awaited his trial with a nervous impatience that was truly distressing. A terrible struggle was evidently going on within his troubled bosom. He seemed dazed, and oblivious of his actual po-



sition and surroundings, and frequently gave incoherent replies to the simplest questions. His suffering was rapidly wearing him out mentally and physically.

"Oh, what a fate!" he would often say to himself when alone; "what a cruel fate! My lips are sealed, and I am looked upon as a murderer. And I will not tell what I know—and suspect—I dare not! If I must die the secret will die with me. How could I have helped it? It was not my fault, but woe is me—woe is me!"

After some months public attention was again called to the murder by a paragraph in the local paper. It stood among the findings of the grand jury:

"Com. vs. Chester Welford. Willful Murder. A true bill. Julia Blackmore prosecutrix."

The criminal court convened in a few weeks, and the Blackmore case was set down on the trial list for the first day. The long agony and suspense would soon be over.

The case, however, was not reached until the afternoon of the second day, when Chester Welford, white and ashen as a corpse, hollow-eyed and hollow-cheeked, with faltering and spiritless step, tottered to the bar, and sank helplessly into a chair. He turned languidly round, and gazed at the assembled throng—the court-room was packed to suffocation—with a wild and restless stare. Then his head sank upon his bosom in utter despondency. His appearance produced a decidedly unfavorable impression upon his numerous sympathizers, who had come in the hope of witnessing his triumphant acquittal, and not a few said in their hearts:

"Ah, see how he looks! He is—he must be guilty! Poor, poor Chester!"

The clerk of the court proceeded to select a jury. The fifth name was called when Mr. Welford's counsel rose to object. The accused shook his head.

"Let him pass, Simpson," he whispered. "It will avail us nothing, and may injure us, for it would look as if we expected favors from the jury. I am innocent—how can they convict me?"

"I fear it will not be so very easy to prove your innocence," returned his counsel, in the same subdued tones. "It would be much easier if you held your tongue at the beginning and would cease hampering us at every step. You are acting as if you would rather be convicted than acquitted. I swear I don't understand it."

Then he scribbled the following upon a piece of paper, which he shoved across the table to his colleague:

"Our client is insane—or else he knows the real criminal, and is trying to shield him. Keep a sharp look out that he does not compromise himself still further."

The accused was called upon to plead. All eyes were again turned upon him. The suspense was fearful, and the room was silent as the grave. He rose slowly to his feet, gave one open, manly look at the judges on the bench, and then turning to the audience said, in a clear and ringing voice:

"Thank God, I am not guilty!"

There was a burst of loud and hearty applause, which was with difficulty suppressed. Even the judges, though they made an effort to look solemn and severe, showed by the sudden lighting up of their somber visages the pleasure they felt at this manly avowal of innocence.

When the jury was sworn, Mr. Bates, the district-attorney, made the opening speech. "A foul murder," he said, "had been committed; a talented young gentleman had met a violent and untimely death; and the commonwealth had lost a useful and patriotic citizen. The sole and only support of a widowed mother and three orphan sisters had been cut down in the prime of life, full of hope and promise. An immortal soul had been hurled unprepared into the presence of its Creator by the murderous hand of a skulking assassin. The life of Allan Blackmore, of Belvidere—the free gift of the Almighty, and over which no one but its Creator had control—had been treacherously taken; and Chester Welford stood before the honorable court and a jury of his peers charged with the foul crime.

"And why and wherefore does Chester Welford stand at this bar to-day, accused of the murder of Allan Blackmore?" continued Mr. Bates, warming to his work. "Your honors, and gentlemen of the jury, I will briefly state the facts of the case, and what we hope to prove against the defendant. We will first show that Allan Blackmore met

with a violent death, in all human probability about nine o'clock on the night of the twelfth of June last past; that he was missed that night from his home; and that six days afterward his lifeless body was found in a clump of trees known by the name of 'Beech Grove,' about a mile from his residence.

"It will be shown by the physicians who examined the body that Allan Blackmore came to his death by a stab-wound in the right side, inflicted by the blade of a pocket-knife. As fate would have it, a portion of the blade broke off in the wound, and was there found by one of the physicians. Upon this tell-tale piece of steel, as fate again would have it, a name stands written in Roman script, and good plain English. Gentlemen of the jury, that name is 'C. Welford,' the name of the prisoner at the bar!

"It will further be shown by several witnesses that the knife of which this is a portion belonged to the accused, and was seen in his possession three days previous to the date of the tragedy. And the last link in the chain of evidence, fastening the guilt upon Mr. Welford beyond all doubt, gentlemen of the jury—as you will acknowledge when you hear the evidence—is the fact that on the evening of the twelfth of June he was seen within a short distance of where the body of Allan Blackmore was afterward found, and only a few minutes before deceased passed the same spot!

"To complete the case, a motive only is wanting. We cannot believe a man—considered as a mere human being, and putting aside all thought of God's awful commandment, Thou shalt not kill—we cannot, I say, believe a man in full possession of his reason and senses would imbue his hands in the life-blood of his fellow-man without a cause—without a great cause. But even this is not wanting in the present case. If it were there would still remain a reasonable doubt of the defendant's guilt, and it might fairly be claimed to entitle him to an acquittal.

"But Chester Welford and Allan Blackmore, unfortunately for both, happened to fall in love with the same young lady—in short, were rivals. Gentlemen, love is conceded to be a strong passion, a very strong passion; but jealousy is even stronger. Who of us is ignorant of the fact that the twin sisters, Jealousy and Revenge, go hand in hand? What need is there to say more?

"Gentlemen of the jury, it only remains to add, that if we fully and clearly prove what we have claimed, we are justified—and more than justified—in asking you for a verdict of willful murder against the defendant, Chester Welford."

Mr. Bates sat down, and one of the lawyers for the prosecution, after consulting a slip of paper, called:

"Mrs. Blackmore!"

An elderly lady, with hair heavily sprinkled with gray and dressed in an elegant mourning suit, arose and walked slowly to the witness-stand. She was sworn in due form, and reverently touched the Bible to her lips, while the big bright tears dripped one by one down her cheeks, and fell in crystal drops upon the binding. She was interrogated by her counsel.

"Your name, madam?"

"Mrs. Julia Blackmore, widow of A. D. Blackmore, of Belvidere."

"What was your son's name, Mrs. Blackmore?"

"He was named after his father, Allan." Here the tears started afresh.

"Was Allan Blackmore your only son?"

"He was my only boy—my only boy." A deep sob.

"When did you see your son Allan last alive?"

"The evening of the twelfth of June last. After supper he played a game of chess with his sister Lilly. He left the house about eight o'clock, as near as I can remember. He did not return."

"Did he say anything to any one in the house as to where he intended going?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did he return that night?"

"No; we did not see him again till——" Here the witness broke down completely, and sobbed like a child.

"Till he was brought home a corpse?"

"Alas, yes; he returned a corpse."

"When was that?"

"On the eighteenth of June, some time in the afternoon."



I was so excited I could not afterward remember the hour. He was brought home in an ice-box by the undertaker."

"You thought at first he had committed suicide?"

"I did not think so till I was informed that was the finding of the coroner's jury. Even then I doubted it; and my daughter Lilly would not listen to such a thing for a moment."

"Why did you have a post-mortem examination performed?"

"Late in the evening the day my son's body was brought home, an anonymous note was flung through the open window by some unknown hand. It was to the effect that my son had been foully dealt with, and that a post-mortem would prove it."

"Is that note now in your possession?"

She nodded assent.

"Please hand it to the jury."

She did so.

When each of the twelve jurors had read and examined it attentively, defendant's counsel asked permission to look it over. Before Chester Welford had read it half through he started as if he had received an electric shock, while his face showed a sudden and intense interest. It seemed as if a new light had broken in upon him, and a heavy load had been lifted from his heart. With one piercing, eager gaze he scrutinized the assembled faces, as if in search of some friend or foe. But he was disappointed.

"Cross-examine, Mr. Simpson!"

Mr. Simpson declined to do so at the present time. The witness would be called again when needed.

Drs. Yale and Knapp were called, one after the other. They described the post-mortem examination in detail, and also, with graphic minuteness, the finding of the knife-blade, the particulars of which are already known. Dr. Yale swore the wound, judging from its location and character, could not be self-inflicted; but his young colleague was more cautious, and declined to say positively whether it could or not.

The defense declined to cross-examine for the present.

Half a dozen witnesses were subpoenaed to prove the accused was the owner of the pocket-knife from which the blade that inflicted the wound had been broken. The first one called testified to having seen it in Mr. Welford's possession three days before Allan Blackmore was reported missing. Further evidence on this point was cut off by the defendant's rising and saying to the jury, before his counsel could prevent him:

"I believe the knife is mine; I freely admit the ownership."

There was no craven fear in the words; they were both manly and dignified; and, strange as it might seem, the effect upon the jury seemed favorable rather than otherwise.

"Richard Walton!"

Mr. Walton was a medium-sized, thickset gentleman of about thirty. A rather good-looking face he had, but it was flushed and puffy, and there were indications about it that said, as plain as whisper in the ear, that he was by no means a total abstainer.

At mention of Richard Walton's name Mr. Welford betrayed great agitation. He flushed pale and red by turns, and manifested an anxious uneasiness quite in contrast with his previous air of careless indifference.

The witness was sworn, and after giving his name and residence, was asked:

"Are you acquainted with the defendant, Chester Welford?"

"Yes, sir; well acquainted."

"Tell the jury where, and what hour, you met Chester Welford on the evening of the twelfth of June last."

"I met Mr. Welford on that evening about half-past eight o'clock, as near as I can remember, and within forty or fifty rods of Beech Grove."

A murmur of surprise and disappointment ran through the audience. It was just perceptible, and to the accused was undeniably of ill-omen. He stared at the witness in a dazed and helpless way.

"In what direction was Mr. Welford going at the time?"

"Toward the grove."

"Did any words or conversation pass between you when you met?"

"Well, yes; we chatted for two or three minutes or so, and then separated."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about Mr. Welford's manner? Was he excited or nervous?"

"I observed he was a little restless, and seemed to be looking out for, or expecting some one, but I did not pay much attention at the time."

"Ah, Walton! Walton!" exclaimed the accused, in broken tones, as he slowly shook his head in solemn reproach, "you are opening my eyes at last!"

Walton apparently took no notice of the interruption. From the first he had carefully avoided looking him in the face. At heart he was ashamed of the part he was acting, and his manner betrayed the secret.

"When Mr. Welford left you, in what direction did you proceed?"

"Welford took the path toward Beech Grove, and I proceeded toward the village. It was not far to the turnpike, and just as I struck it I came upon Jake Conrad, who stopped to show me a horse he had bought the day before. After five minutes or so spent in 'talking horse,' we parted, and I kept on toward the village. I had not proceeded many rods—between twenty and thirty, perhaps—when I met Allan Blackmore. He stopped, and we chatted for a few minutes, and then parted. I chanced to turn back to ask him something I had forgotten, but saw he had left the turnpike and taken the path to Beech Grove. He was walking rapidly, and so far off that I decided not to call after him. That was the last I saw of him alive."

"I wish to ask the witness a question," said Chester, with sudden animation. "Richard Walton, tell the jury what brought you through Beech Grove on that particular evening of the twelfth of June."

The witness colored deeply, stammered, hesitated.

"I decline to state my business. What has it to do with this case?"

"Perhaps a good deal. I insist upon an answer."

Counsel for the prosecution objected to the question, but the objection was overruled by the court.

"I was returning from Miss Balsodare's."

"What was the nature of your business there?"

"I carried a message to Miss Lilian from Allan Blackmore."

"What was the message you carried?"

"How should I know? I suppose, though, it was a request for an interview. It was not the first message I carried in the same direction, but they were usually verbal."

The tone was becoming exultant and defiant.

"Oh, merciful Heaven!"

Chester Welford's head fell heavily upon the table, but he uttered neither cry nor moan. They raised him up—he had fainted. The efforts made to revive him were, however, soon successful.

Lilian Balsodare was called, but she was fortunately too ill to leave home, to Chester's inexpressible delight. Her mother was placed upon the stand. Her testimony showed that the defendant was, up to the date of the tragedy, her daughter's accepted suitor for nearly two years. Allan Blackmore also called at her house, and had long been an unsuccessful claimant for the young lady's hand, though at one time he was regarded with much favor.

The prosecution here rested, and Mr. Simpson opened for the defense. All the evidence offered against his client as yet, he said, was purely circumstantial. It was possible, and even easy, to weave a web of circumstantial evidence around any man, no matter who; and the records of courts are interspersed with numerous cases where innocent men escaped the rope barely "by the skin of their teeth."

He held, and contended, that the case was one of suicide. It would be shown that Allan Blackmore was deeply in debt, had heavily mortgaged his farm, had been unsuccessful in his profession, and, worse than all, was a disappointed and rejected lover. He was a man of keen sensibilities and strong passions, and such as he frequently prefer to perish in defeat than live to survive it. But before dying, lawyer as he was, he had the necessary intelligence to revenge himself upon the world and his rival—his successful rival, Chester Welford! Now, what did Allan Blackmore do in the way of preparation for a final



retirement from a life and a world with which he was profoundly disgusted?

"He began over a year ago by insuring his life for five thousand dollars. In six months afterward he insured that precious life of his—that he intended to take with his own hand—for five thousand more, and soon afterward another five thousand! That was his revenge upon the world—it would provide for the payment of the mortgage, and leave his mother and sisters a modest competence. His account settled with the world, there remained his rival and the lady who had rejected him—how revenge himself upon them—how destroy their happiness? Since he had to fall why not pull them down with him—down to ruin and destruction? It was a bold thing to do—but it could be done, and he would attempt it. He was a lawyer, gentlemen of the jury—remember that. He would skillfully and deliberately weave a web of circumstantial evidence around Chester Welford, his hated rival, in the hope that he would be convicted of murdering him, and so at one stroke forever destroy the happiness of his rival and break the heart of Lilian Balsodare. And, gentlemen, he came very near succeeding.

"But the only point in which he overdid the plot was in securing by stealth or otherwise the pocket-knife belonging to my client—simply because his name was written upon it—and taking his own life with it. In this he certainly must have had an accomplice. Will any man in his sane senses imagine for a moment that a man will plan to commit a murder with a penknife upon the blade of which his name is written, and the ownership known to half the village?

"And again it will be shown that Chester Welford, the day after Blackmore was missed, went about his business as usual; was at his desk at the usual hour; took the train to the city a few hours later; and returned as soon as he possibly could. When the knife-blade was produced before Squire Miller he at once admitted the ownership, as he has done here before you, gentlemen. Did that look like guilt? Would a murderer have done so?

"It is true, indeed, that we cannot explain how the knife left our client's possession; but it would surely be stranger still if we could. When a man wants an article belonging to another for such a purpose as convicting him of murder it isn't likely that he obtains it honestly—and less likely that the owner knows how it is taken.

"Gentlemen, if we clearly prove what we here claim I have every confidence that you will unanimously acquit the defendant. He will thus be enabled to move again among his fellow-men in the enjoyment of that good name and fair fame which was his proud possession up to the date of his arrest, and which is dearer—far dearer—to him than life itself."

We will not weary the reader with the evidence adduced and brought out on cross-examination. The strongest testimony as to the uniformly excellent and high moral character of the accused was offered, and could not be gainsaid. Suffice it to say that the points claimed by defendant's counsel were established as to the facts; but the inferences sought to be drawn therefrom were powerfully combatted by the opposing counsel. The trial was not concluded, and the case given to the jury, until nearly seven o'clock the following evening.

The spectators slowly dispersed. They looked depressed and saddened, and spoke in whispers. The opinion was general that it would go hard with Chester Welford—in fact, that his conviction was almost certain. In this feeling he himself also shared.

"I am a dead man, Mr. Simpson," he said to his counsel, as he thanked him warmly for the exertions he had made in his behalf; "but it cannot be helped, and there is nothing left but to meet my fate like—"

"Pshaw!" returned the lawyer, with emphasis, "let us hope for the best. There is no use in looking only on the dark side. You are innocent; trust me; things will come out all right yet."

Owing to the damaging nature of the evidence adduced against the defendant, the district attorney deemed it prudent to have a strict watch kept over him at the hotel, lest he should attempt to escape; and Silas Warner, the county detective, was charged with that duty.

Chester Welford tottered to his room, and flung himself

at full length upon the snowy couch, burying his face in the downy pillows.

"Alas!" he groaned, "there is now but little doubt that Lilian did the deed. She met him by appointment in the grove—no!" he exclaimed, with frightful vehemence, starting up and wildly pacing the floor like a maniac; "she must have been inveigled there by some of his devilish arts. Then he attempted to abduct her—used force—and she killed him in self-defense? I see it all. How fortunate that she had my knife—oh, it was rare good fortune that she forgot to return it! The villain richly deserved his fate. I will save her at any cost. My lips are sealed, and I shall die without a murmur. But why, why does she not come? Oh, Lilian, Lilian, Lilian! how little we dreamed of the dark cloud that was so soon to settle upon our happy, happy lives!"

He moaned and tossed in throes of agony for nearly an hour. Supper was brought, but he could not touch it. The sun lowered and disappeared behind the western hills; the shadows darkened, and the gray twilight settled down, rapidly fading into night. Save an occasional sigh or smothered groan, no sign of life came from that prostrate figure, bruised in heart and sick of soul.

The clock in the hall-way struck nine. It was dark in the room, and silent as the grave. Suddenly the sorrow-stricken inmate arose and went to the window, as if stifling for want of air.

"I cannot stand this—it's killing me! Oh, if Lilian would only come! Mother will soon be here; but, oh, if Lilian would only come—if I could look into her face, and clasp her hand once more, and tell her that she is safe—that I will meet my fate like a man—that love and forgiveness—"

A soft tapping is heard at the door.

"Ah, I know that knock," he thought, as he hastily lit the lamp. "Presently," he said. Then the door was thrown open, and Lilian Balsodare, accompanied by her mother, stood upon the threshold.

At the same instant the solemn toll of the deep-toned court-house bell was heard rousing the silent air into vibration. The jury had agreed upon their verdict, and the judge had directed, in case they should so agree before ten o'clock, that the bell should be rung for the assembling of court in order to receive and record it. Chester Welford had barely time to press Lilian's fair hand to his parched lips ere the sheriff appeared upon the scene.

He was wanted in the court-room!

## CHAPTER VI.

### SORELY TEMPTED.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon your verdict?" formally demanded the clerk of the court.

"We have," briefly responded the foreman, rising in his place and handing a document to that official, who looked over it, and passed it to the judge.

"Gentlemen of the jury, listen to your verdict as it has been recorded by the court. You, and each of you, find upon your oaths that the defendant, Chester Welford, is guilty of murder, in manner and form as charged in the indictment?"

"We do."

Two piercing shrieks are heard, and then a confused sobbing.

"My mother and Jenny," sighed Chester to his father, who had just clasped him in his arms; "God help them!"

Their arms were soon around his neck, and their warm kisses upon his cheek. Let the curtain fall!

The jury was discharged, court was adjourned, and Chester Welford was taken in custody by the sheriff, and lodged in the county prison.

It was the evening succeeding the conviction. The following day would be Saturday—sentence day—when those convicted during the week would be called before the court to hear the solemn sentence of the law. The concluding portion of his sentence kept ringing in the ears of Chester Welford; his vivid imagination already pictured himself in the dock—"hanged by the neck until you are dead; and may the Lord have mercy on your soul!"



The emotions thronging the mind and tearing the heart of Lilian Balsodare at this time may be easier imagined than described. The night before sleep forsook her eyelids; at intervals her tears fell like rain upon the pillows; and with one horrid thought her soul was racked—was Chester an assassin? It could not be, oh, it could not be; and yet that fatal knife-blade—the verdict of guilty! She had not heard the evidence in court, and the sudden arrival of the sheriff the evening before gave no opportunity for explanation.

During the trial she was too weak and ill to leave her room. All day she wandered about in a restless, semi-conscious, state that was truly distressing. Her face had a ghastly pallor, her eyes that glassy glare so often seen in those laboring under intense excitement, while the dark zones beneath only served to heighten their brilliancy.

It was evening, and the sky was overcast with leaden clouds that came creeping up from the west, spreading their gloomy wings as they passed, and quenching the polished silver and burnished gold of the early sunset. A strange, unearthly twilight it was that came on so suddenly and unexpectedly. Lilian strayed listlessly into the orchard. The gloaming, sad and weird as it was, seemed to fold her round in silent sympathy. It seemed to fill her surcharged heart with "whispered balm and sunshine spoken."

On reaching the scene of her last interview with Allan Blackmore she threw herself upon the mossy bank again, and gave way to the flood of agonizing sorrow that filled her soul to overflowing.

"What a wretched, wretched creature I am!" she exclaimed, bitterly. "Two young and happy lives destroyed, and I am the cause of it all. May Heaven have pity on me, I am the ruin of both! Oh, dear! oh! oh!"

And she wrung her hands and moaned piteously.

A soft, low voice from the fence beside her broke the silence that succeeded that first outburst of grief.

"Miss Balsodare!"

She started to her feet.

"I bring you pleasant news, Miss Lilian," continued the voice. "Come nearer, for I do not wish to be overheard. There is no need to be alarmed."

Looking in the direction from whence the voice proceeded, she saw the figure of a man leaning against the fence upon the opposite side, but the light was not sufficient to distinguish his features. She approached a few steps, but still kept a respectful distance.

"What is your pleasant news, may I ask?" she faltered. "It will be thankfully appreciated just now, I assure you, sir."

"You would be delighted to know of something that would secure Chester Welford's acquittal, would you not?" he asked, his voice sinking to a whisper.

"I would, indeed," was the eager reply; "but, alas! he is already convicted; and, worse still, he is to be sentenced to-morrow."

"I am aware of that," coolly returned her unknown friend. "He will be sentenced to be hanged." Had a dagger been plunged into her heart it would have hurt her less than these few words, so carelessly and lightly spoken. "Nevertheless," he continued, after a pause, "it is yet possible to avert that sentence. There is sufficient time to save him. But it all depends upon you."

"Then it is done. There is no use standing upon formality at such a time as this. Although I know not who you are, I suppose you must be a friend, and do not hesitate to tell you frankly that I would, if necessary, give my own life to save his. But he is innocent, is he not?"

"So great a sacrifice is not necessary. I am happy to say. About his guilt or innocence I know nothing; but, with your assistance, we can prove Allan Blackmore committed suicide."

"Oh, I cannot swear to a lie," she said, quickly. "I could not do that—no, not even to save his life; and he would despise me if I did. I do not know whether Mr. Blackmore committed suicide or not."

"Ah, you mistake me," quietly returned the speaker. "We do not require your evidence in any shape or way. But you must sacrifice your feelings a little if you wish

us to succeed—to put it plainly, if you wish to save Chester Welford's life."

"Willingly—eagerly—if it will be of any service to Chester."

"The matter is very simple as far as you are concerned," he went on. "All you have to do is to write him a note informing him that you feel it your duty to release him from his engagement to you—in other words, that he must give you up."

"I do not understand you," she returned, coldly. "How can such conduct on my part be of any earthly service? You are surely jesting."

"It's rather a grave subject to jest about, Miss Balsodare," observed the stranger, in an offended tone. "The plain truth of the matter is that if you do not break your engagement with Chester Welford, and give him up forever, he is going to swing—that is all!"

"The condition is, indeed, a most curious one. May I ask, in the first place, why it is assumed that I am engaged to Mr. Welford?"

"Rest assured that such is known to be the fact."

Lilian could feel her cheeks burn, and thanked the friendly darkness for its shelter.

"In the next place, how can my giving up Mr. Welford prove his innocence, I would like to know?"

"It is strange, indeed; but, for all that, it is true. We have a witness who can prove that Allan Blackmore made full preparations for committing suicide, even to giving directions for his funeral, and pointing out the spot where he wished to be buried. Better yet, there is in existence a letter written by him on the morning of the twelfth of June, in which he avows his determination to commit suicide in Beech Grove that very night."

"Oh, blessed be Heaven! then Chester is innocent!"

And the tears flowed afresh; but now they were tears of joy, and the heart harrowed with a torturing doubt and pierced with a poignant sorrow felt the healing touch of a mighty relief.

"But the d—— of it is, Miss Balsodare, if you will excuse the expression, that our witness won't budge an inch until you write out and sign a note to Chester Welford, forbidding him ever again to think of you as his betrothed, or have any hope of ever calling you his wife. Now, do you understand?"

"Who is the witness who makes such a strange condition?" asked Lilian, in a tone of eager curiosity.

"I am not at liberty to disclose her name."

"Ah! I thought as much—it is a lady! Well, I suspect who she is," and a jealous tone was discernible in her voice.

"It is undoubtedly Miss Edgeworth," was the idea that flashed through her mind. Then, aloud:

"Tell the young lady, now that I believe Chester is innocent, I would not give him up—no, not if he stood upon the gallows with the rope around his neck. Go, tell her that!"

"Then I have been very much mistaken, Miss Balsodare. I was given to understand that you really loved Chester Welford. I am sorry to find you hold his life so lightly. You would sacrifice him to your selfishness. Are you not now doing so?"

"Stay! I will think of it," she called, hurriedly, as he turned away. "I do not know what I ought to do under the circumstances. Did you say my giving up Chester would surely save him and prove his innocence?"

"Most assuredly—and nothing else. Think of what he would do, and of what he would sacrifice for your sake were he in your place and you in his. If it came to a question of saving your life would he hesitate, think you?"

"He would not—oh! he certainly would not. And—I'll write—that note! I have been the cause of one death already. Oh! Chester! Chester! how can I do anything so cruel and heartless? What must I write?"

"Here is the substance of what is wanted," and he handed across the fence a folded paper. "Copy it, and I shall here await your return."

"Must I leave him no hope?—not even the faintest? Oh! that is so—so cruel! Perhaps she will relent. Tell her it would break my heart. She will have mercy on me—she surely will!"

"You must pledge yourself solemnly not to accept any



attentions from Mr. Welford, when he is released, and never to accept his hand. So much is absolutely necessary."

"Oh! I cannot—stay, I will consider. Give me a little time; 'tis a serious step. Let me have till morning—till daybreak. Do, for the love of Heaven!"

"Very well, then," replied the stranger, as he turned to go. "I shall return here at daybreak, and wait your final answer. Only do not keep me too long waiting, for there is not a minute to be lost."

In a moment he had disappeared in the darkness.

The anguish, suffering, and torture of that long night, language is too weak to describe. It was a night of tears, of sighs, and desolation of spirit. Toward daybreak the poor girl sank unconscious upon the floor from sheer exhaustion. When she next opened her eyes the morning sun was shining brilliantly far into her room; the birds were twittering in the apple trees, and the hands of the nickel-plated time-piece upon the wall pointed to half-past eight!

She hurried wildly into the orchard. She stood again upon that mossy bank, and looked eagerly around. But she saw no one; the place was silent and deserted.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A DIFFICULT TASK.

The first of February was the date fixed for Chester Welford's execution; and the doomed man at once entered upon his preparations for death. He had no hope of pardon to distract his thoughts from the contemplation of the spirit-world he so soon expected to enter, and consequently he devoted himself entirely to making his peace with God and with his fellow-man.

With the discovery of Lilian's innocence of the killing of Allan Blackmore, his misfortune lost more than half its sting; and he began to regain his cheerful spirits, and something of his usual animation. His counsel had yet strong hopes of averting the execution of the dread sentence of the law—in which, however, his client did not share—even after his efforts to obtain an arrest of judgment and a new trial had proved unsuccessful.

Based upon the information obtained by Miss Balsodare from the unknown gentleman in the orchard, respecting the proofs of Allan Blackmore's suicide, an attempt was made to have the case reopened. But the prosecuting attorney made so vigorous an opposition, boldly declaring that Miss Balsodare had perjured herself in order to save her lover's life—and the evidence itself being of so flimsy a character, the hearsay evidence of a party unknown—that the hope from this direction was very faint, indeed.

"Richard Walton knows more about this case than any man living," said Chester Welford to Mr. Simpson, one day, when the latter was paying him a visit. "I suspected him from the moment he put his foot upon the witness stand. The detectives should watch him closely, even after I am gone; for it would be a consolation to have the stigma removed from my name, and justice done to my memory."

"They have been constantly on his trail from the first," returned his counsel; "but, drunk or sober, he has never let slip a remark that threw any light upon the tragedy. They report of late that he is very flush of money, and is spending it freely. Peterson tells me he used every effort, on three different occasions, when he found him pretty well intoxicated, to pump some information out of him, but always found him as dry as a rock."

"Walton is an old toper," said the doomed man, gloomily. "Such as he never blab in their cups. But I am convinced he knows all about it, for all that. The point is how to get it out of him."

"Miss Balsodare strongly suspects it was from Miss Edgeworth the overtures for your release came, and that it is in her power to prove your innocence."

"She tells me so; but Miss Edgeworth was not in Belvidere at the time. Still it may be as she says; but even so, how can the secret be obtained?"

"We have employed an agent—a lady—to form her acquaintance and see what she can observe and learn. She reports that Miss Edgeworth has in her possession several

costly volumes, inscribed: 'From A. B. to M. E., with fondest affection;' also that she wears a beautiful ring, marked on the inside, 'A. B. to M. E.'"

"'A. B.'? They are presents from Allan Blackmore. For some reason best known to herself she bears me no good will; and there is little danger of her serving me, except that it is to her own interest to do so. Has any trace been found of the gentleman who met Miss Balsodare in the orchard, and claimed to possess proofs of Blackmore's suicide?"

"Not a shadow of a trace—no, not more than if the ground had opened and swallowed him up."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Something must be done, Mr. Peterson!" It was Abel Simpson who spoke thus to one of his detectives. "She is the party, no doubt; and now, the point is to wring from her the secret. And we must be quick about it, or my client is a dead man."

"You underrate the difficulties of the situation, Mr. Simpson," returned Peterson, with a shrug, as he referred again to his note-book. "Granting that she knows all about the affair, we cannot take her by the throat and force her to confess. You can't compel a woman to talk when she has determined to remain silent. We have tried a heavy bribe, but it wouldn't work. She shammed ignorance of the whole business. If you had her on the witness-stand you might compel her to answer; and if you did she might tell you she knew nothing about it. But you can't get her there. She is out of the State."

"Something must be done, and that quickly," returned Mr. Simpson. "I shall board the next train to New York, and you hold yourself in readiness to start for Trenton at a moment's notice. Telegraph your agent to keep a sharp eye on Miss Edgeworth and to meet me to-morrow about eight, at the usual place."

The two shook hands and separated, Mr. Simpson going direct to the depot, where he boarded the first train to the city.

On arriving there he at once made his way to the office of a famous medical expert—a gentleman of national reputation in his profession. He briefly stated his business.

"Can you help us?" he asked, with a wistful look. "Is there any way known to science by which a person may be induced or compelled to tell what they know about a certain subject? If that can't be done I fear we are lost."

"From whom do you wish to obtain the information—the gentleman or the lady?" asked the expert, eagerly.

"From both, if possible, but from the lady by all means," was the reply.

"Of what age is the lady in question? Much depends upon that."

"About twenty-five, I should judge, or between twenty-five and thirty."

"We may succeed with the lady!" exclaimed the expert, his face suddenly lighting up; "but as to the gentleman I have little hope. There are two ways of accomplishing such a purpose," he continued, slowly, as if reflecting deeply. "We will try one, and if that fails fall back upon the other."

"How is it to be done?" demanded the lawyer, impatiently.

"It is done in a very mysterious way, Mr. Simpson, and I must do it. You will see how when the time comes. It's five hundred dollars if I succeed—if I fail, fifty dollars and my expenses."

"Your terms are accepted; and now let us start as soon as possible."

The afternoon of the following day Marian Edgeworth was invited to accompany a young lady, whose acquaintance she had recently formed, on a certain mysterious and interesting call she was just about to make. In the course of the conversation that ensued it came out that Miss Westmerry wished to consult a clairvoyant who had recently arrived in town, whose prophetic powers were reputed to be wonderful, and whose knowledge of the past was scarcely less marvelous than his insight of the future.

A morbid fancy for the mysterious and supernatural was one of Miss Edgeworth's strongest traits. She was of dark complexion, spare, and nervous, and of a strongly



marked hysterical diathesis, which she inherited from her mother. It is scarcely necessary to add that the invitation was readily accepted.

They soon reached the office of Signor Peppo, and entered an anteroom where those who were desirous of raising the veil of futurity had to await their turn. Miss Edgeworth and her companion found several there before them, who, one after another, disappeared into the sanctum, to emerge in a few minutes, some with smiling faces, others downcast and depressed.

Miss Westmerry now entered, and in less than five minutes returned, with countenance enraptured, as if her vision of the future had been elysian in its happiness and brightness.

Miss Edgeworth's curiosity was excited.

"He told me what I thought no one on earth but myself knew!" said Miss Westmerry, in a tone of surprise and astonishment. "And, oh! congratulate me—I am to be married to the very man I love. I haven't felt so light-hearted in years."

"Do you really believe in him?" asked her companion, seriously.

"How can I help it? I saw it all in a little glass globe. He's such a queer man—with a long, white beard and a massive forehead."

"I believe I'll consult him, too, now as I am here, if you will be so good as to wait," observed Miss Edgeworth, all aglow with excitement. "I need not believe what he says, you know; and besides it will do no harm. I love to anticipate—it is so very fascinating."

Throwing off her wrap, she timidly opened the door and entered. A tall, large-boned man, standing beside an old, leather-covered arm-chair, was the first object that arrested her attention. His beard and hair were long and white, his features large and somewhat coarse; his eyes had a sepulchral expression, and his voice was deep and hollow.

With a graceful gesture, he invited her to be seated.

"I wish to know a little of my future, good Signor Peppo, if you please," she said. "What is your fee?" and she drew forth her porte-monnaie.

Signor Peppo had an Italian name, but spoke good English, nevertheless. He took from the little table beside him a small sphere of glass, from the center of which numerous silvery rays seemed to radiate toward the surface. Holding it about a foot from her eyes, and a few inches above their level, he directed her to fix her gaze steadily upon it.

"You will soon see for yourself, mademoiselle, if you look steadily at this sphere, the veil of futurity partially withdrawn, and read your own fortune therein. And, if you allow me, by stroking your forehead thus the vision will be made more clear and distinct."

He made a series of passes across her forehead and before her face; and soon her head began to droop a little, and her gaze became vacant and dreamy.

"Now you cannot open your eyes," was the wizard's confident assertion.

"I cannot," she assented.

Signor Peppo gave a signal. A gentleman entered noiselessly through an inner door, and stood waiting with pencil and paper.

"Now we are all ready, Mr. Simpson," said the wizard. "Our subject is under the influence, and will answer me any question I choose to put."

Miss Edgeworth was indeed mesmerized, and her knowledge of the tragedy, if she possessed any, would soon be in their possession—the secret would be learned from her own lips.

It may be well to state that this mesmeric influence is a genuine and actual condition, and not the idle fiction of a novelist's brain. But to this influence perhaps not more than one in ten are susceptible.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SECRET A GREAT SURPRISE.

"Your name, mademoiselle?" demanded the wizard, in imperious tones.

"Marian Edgeworth."

"And your age?"

"Thirty years."

"Were you acquainted with a gentleman of Belvidere named Allan Blackmore?"

"I was, sir; well acquainted."

"You loved him very much, did you not?"

"Better than any one else in the world."

"Tell us why he committed suicide?"

"Who?"

"Allan Blackmore."

"He did not commit suicide."

"Do you know who killed him, then?"

"I do not know." After a pause, "He was not killed." This was becoming rather mysterious. If he was not killed, and did not commit suicide, in what manner did he lose his life?

"Was he poisoned, then?" was the puzzled query.

"Not at all," was the confident reply.

"But was he not said to be found dead in Beech Grove, near Belvidere, on the eighteenth of June?"

"Certainly; but he was not found dead there."

Mr. Simpson was sorely perplexed, and was rapidly coming to the conclusion that Miss Edgeworth had no consciousness of what she was saying, and that her replies were incoherent and unreliable. His heart sank within him as he thought of the near approach of the first of February, and the innocent victim in his narrow and gloomy cell, patiently awaiting his doom.

"Who was it, then, whose dead body was found there?"

"I do not know, indeed. Richard Walton can tell you that."

"Now, tell us what became of Allan Blackmore after his disappearance from Belvidere on the night of the twelfth of June? Where is he now?"

"He has been in Paterson most of the time since. He is there now."

"When did you see him last?"

"About a week ago. He paid me a visit."

Mr. Simpson was startled almost out of his wits. Was it possible she was telling the truth, and that Allan Blackmore was yet living?

"Is her information to be depended upon, professor?" he eagerly inquired, turning to Signor Peppo.

"Undoubtedly, as far as it goes," was the reply. "In this state there can be no willful deception. The subject evidently believes your man is still living—and, no doubt, she is correct. Were the features of the murdered man fully and conclusively identified as those of Allan Blackmore?"

"No, sure enough," returned Mr. Simpson, clapping his hands in ecstasy of delight. "They were so swollen and shapeless as to be unrecognizable! I see it all. He has played us a trick—a mean, scurvy, despicable trick! The—scoundrel!"

"Remember, my dear sir," suggested the so-called Signor Peppo—who has before this time been recognized by the reader as the New York medical expert engaged by Mr. Simpson—"remember that your capture of Allan Blackmore will not be sufficient to prove the innocence of your client. He will still be suspected of murdering the victim found in Beech Grove."

"Ah, that is only too true, unfortunately," murmured the lawyer, with a well-marked falling inflection. "Ask who killed the man found there," he suggested, suddenly brightening up.

"Who, then, was the murdered man found in Beech Grove?" asked the wizard, turning again to his subject.

"I do not know," was the simple reply. "He was not murdered."

"Is there any one who knows how he lost his life—any one that you know of?"

"Yes; Richard Walton."

"Any one else?" continued the wizard, anxious to have as much information on the subject as possible.

"Yes; Allan Blackmore."

This reply was given with evident reluctance.

"Why did Allan Blackmore disappear from Belvidere the evening of the twelfth of June?"

To this the subject made no reply, and the question was repeated.



"To—to—get the—insurance on his life," was the hesitating reply.

Mr. Simpson's pencil was flying over his note-book.

"Where is he now, you say?"

"In Paterson."

"Do you receive letters from him very often?"

"Yes; quite often."

Again the same hesitation; evidently the answer was distasteful to the subject.

"Will you write him a note just now? I will tell you what to say."

"I will try."

"A decoy letter is just the thing," whispered the lawyer. "Get him to Philadelphia, or to Easton, and we'll settle accounts with him double quick."

And his eyes danced with delight at the thought, so that they threatened to start from their sockets.

The wizard placed writing materials before his subject, and directed her to write the following note which he dictated, word by word:

"MY DEAR ALLAN.—I am called in haste to Easton, Pa. As soon as I arrive I shall write you particulars. If I am successful, your presence will be required—so hold yourself in readiness. Yours as ever,

"MARIAN."

"Now fold the note, inclose it, and write the address."

The young lady obeyed mechanically. The following was dictated and written in a similar manner:

"DEAREST ALLAN.—I want to see you immediately. An important event has taken place which threatens to seriously interfere with the success of your plans. The address is No. 15 ——— street. It is to your interest to come as quickly as possible. Yours in haste,

"MARIAN E."

"These will serve your purpose, Mr. Simpson," said Signor Peppo, handing the notes to the lawyer, who was nearly overcome with joy. "Post the first immediately, and some time to-morrow have the second mailed from Easton. Then all you have to do is to watch for your man, and have him arrested and identified as soon as he crosses the Delaware. The rest is easy."

"That is all we want," gleefully assented the lawyer, as he cautiously left the room, washing his hands "with invisible soap in imperceptible water."

Signor Peppo blew a puff of air in the face of his subject, and snapped his fingers; the fixed and dreamy look disappeared in an instant, and the young lady, with a sigh and a start, awoke again to consciousness.

The wizard laid aside his little sphere of glass, and told her what he saw therein, explaining to her that on account of the state of her nervous system at the time she was unable to see the manifestations, but that to his eyes they were plainly visible.

"You love—dearly love a handsome young gentleman, with dark complexion and glossy black curls; a lawyer by profession, and residing temporarily in a manufacturing city in the northeastern portion of the State." Evidently the clairvoyant knew his business, at least was telling her the truth, thought the young lady, and she gazed at him with an expression in which wonder and awe were blended. "He loves you at present," he continued, "but not many months ago he loved another, and she rejected him. He is now supposed to be dead and buried, and this supposition has been the means of putting thousands of dollars in his pocket."

A sharp cry burst from the young lady's lips, her bosom heaved violently, she gasped for breath, and her eyes were fixed upon the wizard in a wild stare of astonishment. She knew not whether to remain or fly.

"For the supposed murder of your lover," he went on, "an innocent person has been found guilty, and sentenced to death. But his innocence will be proved in time to save his life, and your lover shall fail in his scheme of revenge."

Miss Edgeworth expressed her delight with a warmth of which woman alone is capable.

"But," she faltered, "shall I—be—married to him—to Allan?" She spoke in a low whisper, flushing a deep scarlet as her lover's name escaped her in an unguarded moment. "Does he care very much for me now?"

The wizard again held up the magic sphere, and looked long and thoughtfully into its depths.

"He loves you," he replied, speaking slowly, "and there

is nothing to prevent his marrying you, except a death—the death of the young man now under sentence. In that case your lover may marry Miss Balsodare!"

With a stifled cry Miss Edgeworth burst into tears, and bounded like a frightened deer from the room. She was wholly unconscious of what had taken place while in the trance-state, and little suspected that she herself had imparted most of the information upon which Signor Peppo had drawn in "telling her fortune." She grasped Miss Westmerry by the arm and hurried her out of the house.

"Do you believe in Signor Peppo, dear?" asked her companion, who had so cleverly played her role of detective.

"For pity's sake, don't ask me now," she replied, still trembling violently. "I do believe he is a wizard or—an infernal spirit, if there ever was such a thing in this world."

When Miss Edgeworth reached her own apartment she fastened her door, and then threw herself in a heap upon the floor, while her feelings found expression in a copious flood of tears.

"'Twill go hard with me," she muttered to herself at length, "if he ever marries Lilian Balsodare! Oh, dear! if she only signed that note giving up Welford, I would have liberated him at any cost—yes, even if Allan killed me for it afterward! But now, what is to be done? What is to be done?"

## CHAPTER IX.

### A RACE FOR LIFE.

The address written by Miss Edgeworth upon the letters in Signor Peppo's office was simply:

"ALLAN BLACKMORE, Esq.,

"Box 2040, Paterson, N. J."

So they could not at once discover him and watch his movements. All they could do was to have a strict watch kept upon "Box 2040," and await his appearance when he came for his mail. He would then be shadowed, and every movement watched and reported to headquarters. The co-operation of the postmaster was secured, and events were impatiently awaited.

Miss Edgeworth's first letter arrived in due time, and was placed with several others in the box indicated. But three days had elapsed before it was called for, and then by a middle-aged lady!—a widow, the keeper of a respectable boarding-house located on one of the quietest streets in Paterson.

Careful inquiry elicited the fact that a gentleman partly answering to the description of Allan Blackmore had boarded there for several months, and had that day returned after a week's sojourn in town. The same evening he was seen to leave the house, and was recognized beyond all reasonable doubt as Allan Blackmore, of Belvidere! But he had undergone quite a marked transformation: his beard had been allowed to grow, and he was dressed in a style entirely different from his usual habiliments.

When this fact was reported to Peterson, who was awaiting events at Easton, the second letter was mailed, and the necessary papers made out for the arrest of Mr. Blackmore upon a charge of "conspiring to defraud" the insurance companies of fifteen thousand dollars, the amount of the policies upon his life.

Strange as it may appear, Mr. Simpson had as yet said nothing to his client about the astounding discovery he had made; he contented himself with vague and mysterious allusions to the possibility of his early release, with his innocence established, and his fair fame restored. To these, however, the poor prisoner responded with a grateful but incredulous smile.

"Thank you very much, my dear friend," he would say. "It is possible, indeed, but not probable," and with a sigh he would adroitly turn the subject.

The lawyer, well aware of the uncertainty of sublunary events, wished to wait till he had Allan Blackmore securely in his clutches before raising hopes that might prove delusive; and besides, he was in mortal terror lest the news should leak out in some way and come to the ears of Richard Walton, who, he felt certain, was in communication with his friend Blackmore, and the latter, at the first



breath of suspicion, would take himself safely out of sight. His client's case would then be just as desperate as before, for he well knew that the information obtained from Miss Edgeworth in such a peculiar way would not be entertained at the time by any court of justice.

Meanwhile much valuable time had elapsed, and there was barely a week to the date fixed for the execution. Already the rasp of saw and click of hammer were heard in the prison, in the yard of which the carpenters were erecting a gibbet. They were terribly ominous sounds to the ears of the hopeless victim within.

When the sounds first attracted his attention he nervously asked what they were, to which the official returned but a sympathetic look and an evasive reply.

"Ah, I understand!" sighed the poor fellow, with a ghastly smile. "They are erecting the gallows. Ah, well!—'man proposes, but God disposes.' I am content." He did not again refer to the subject.

Lawyer Simpson was to remain up that night to receive the news from Easton. He was too excited to sleep. He had arranged that the telegraph operator should remain at his post all night, in order to receive the expected message.

Seven—eight—nine o'clock—and yet no news. Perhaps they did not happen to find the alderman in his office, and were awaiting his return.

Ten—eleven—midnight!—and yet no word from Peterson. He would ask him the cause of such long and unexpected delay.

Click-a-click! went the instrument, and in ten minutes came the reply:

"Our expected guest has not yet arrived, and he has given our man in Paterson the slip."

Early next morning word was received from Paterson that their agent had again struck Blackmore's trail, and that he was *en route* for Trenton! This was alarming news, for it was more than possible he might call at Miss Edgeworth's, and inquire about her. Should he happen to find her home an explanation would certainly follow, his suspicions would be at once aroused, and he would leave secretly for parts unknown.

A hurried consultation was again held, and it was decided that Mr. Simpson should set out for the capital without a moment's delay, obtain an interview with the governor, and lay the case before him. The New York expert was instructed to wire to the governor his affidavit concerning the information obtained from Miss Edgeworth, and the reliability of the same.

With this, and the report of the detective who had recognized Mr. Blackmore in Paterson, added to his own testimony, Mr. Simpson had the strongest hopes of obtaining a respite of several months in favor of his client. But he was scarcely a mile upon his journey when the up-train rushed past him, carrying with it in a dingy leather mail-bag an official-looking document, with the seal of the commonwealth, and directed to the sheriff of Belvidere County. It was the warrant for the execution of Chester Welford.

Late that evening Abel Simpson, travel-soiled, tired, and hungry, called at the governor's residence, only to learn that he was out of town, and not expected to return till the evening of the first of February.

"Where has he gone?" asked the lawyer, in despair.

"On a deer-hunting expedition, somewhere in the interior of the State," answered the domestic.

Mr. Simpson uttered a rash exclamation—changed to "hades" in the late revision of the Bible—and turned hastily and angrily away.

\* \* \* \* \*

About seven o'clock on the morning of the first of February a stout, elderly gentleman, with a florid face, upon which stood great beads of perspiration, rushed frantically into the telegraph office in a little town located near the center of the State.

"Here—send this message from the governor—quick!" he shouted, hoarsely. "It is a respite, a reprieve; and if it doesn't arrive in time—before eight o'clock—an innocent man will lose his life—quick!"

"Wire's down!" growled the operator. "Can't be sent from here till repaired—only one wire. Take it over to Fonte—three wires there—can't all be down!"

"Oh——!"—we hope the recording angel blotted out the exclamation after registering it; we have not the heart to write it. "Where is this place Fonte, and how far? Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!"

"Due north, six or seven miles. Have to hurry up—snow is purty deep."

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" groaned Abel Simpson—for it was he—looking around him helplessly.

"Snow's purty deep," said the operator, briskly. "Come, I'll show you a livery-stable and help you hitch up. This way—run!" He was just beginning to understand the situation.

Picking out the best horse in the stable, they harnessed the animal to a light cutter, and in a few minutes were ready to start.

"Guess I'll go along, an' show you the road," said the young man, suggestively. "You might easily miss it, the snow's so deep."

"Yes, yes," assented the other, "jump in. Get up!"

When within a mile of Fonte they unluckily ran into a snow-drift, the sleigh was upset, and before the frightened animal could be controlled his plunging had broken both shafts beyond the possibility of repair. It was promptly decided that Mr. Simpson should proceed alone on horseback. On entering the town he looked at his watch—it wanted twenty minutes of eight. There was still sufficient time to save his client, and he heaved a great sigh of relief, and pushed on.

Just as he entered the telegraph office the stroke of a clock arrested his attention. Looking up he saw, to his unutterable dismay, that the hands pointed to eight.

His watch was stopped by the shock when he was thrown from the sleigh, and Chester Welford was now standing upon the drop! With an unearthly cry of anguish and despair he threw the dispatch to the operator, and then fell to the floor as if struck by lightning. It was apoplexy; and Abel Simpson had tried his last case, and made his last plea for the acquittal of the innocent or conviction of the guilty.

The heart-rending scene in the prisoner's cell on the morning of the first of February mere language is inadequate to describe. With his mother's arms clasped tightly around his neck, and those of Jenny—his faithful sister Jenny—on the other, he was well-nigh suffocated; and with the conflicting emotions of the moment his bosom heaved and his heart bounded madly, as if vainly endeavoring to burst from its inclosure.

To add to his already unbearable sorrow, his beloved Lilian held both his hands in hers, and the kisses of mother and sister upon lips and cheek were sufficient to unman the bravest heart. His father stood away in the corner, with his face turned to the wall, in silent agony, for "his grief was too great for tears."

"For God's sake," pleaded the poor fellow at last, in a hoarse and broken voice, "let me go! Let me go—I can't stand this! There—there—bid me good-by, all of you, then leave my sight, and let me die in peace. Oh, Lilian! Take her away, mother—Jenny—or I cannot feel reconciled to die! Oh, this is cruel!"

But they only clung to him the closer.

## CHAPTER X.

### A DANCE UPON NOTHING.

The solemn and sepulchral toll of the prison bell gave warning that the time for the sad procession to start on its way had arrived. The manifestations of grief are redoubled. The prison yard is half filled with spectators, and around the walls are assembled thousands occupying every available position.

Where all this time is Mr. Simpson? or has he deserted his client at the last moment? And where is Peterson? Not that he expected a reprieve—oh, no; but he wanted to say good-by—to thank them warmly for their efforts.

What uproar is that outside the walls? It spreads and grows more intense. Is it a riot? or is a rescue being attempted? There is a rush for the prison gates, but they are fast; and—yes—the commotion has penetrated within, and a cheer comes from without, followed by another and another.

The sheriff turns pale, and stands close beside his pris-



oner. There seems to be a scuffle inside, and two men are approaching hurriedly, dragging between them—Allan Blackmore of Belvidere!

He had returned in disguise to witness the execution, but was tracked the whole way, and arrested at the prison gate.

Face to face—the supposed murderer and the supposed victim!

The sheriff held an official paper in his hand—the warrant for the execution. On seeing Blackmore before him in the flesh—he was an intimate acquaintance—he dropped the warrant at his feet, and clasped the prisoner in his arms.

The scene that ensued baffles description; and before the prisoner could fully realize what had happened he had fainted from excitement and exhaustion.

The sheriff pointed to the gibbet:

"Tear that thing down!"

In a moment the crashing and splintering of wood was heard, and there was a confused mingling of sobbing, cheering, crying, and wild and joyous laughter.

"A reprieve! a reprieve!" was shouted, in thunder-tones, from the outside, and the operator, without hat or coat, and speechless from excitement, rushed wildly in, flourishing a paper above his head. It was Abel Simpson's dispatch from the governor.

Allan Blackmore broke jail before a week, and got safely out of the State. He determined to try his fortunes in the recently discovered gold region in the Black Hills, and made his way there with as little delay as possible.

Chester Welford was, of course, released. He was once more a free man; and now knowing the blessings of liberty, enjoyed it a thousand times more than if he had never been incarcerated.

But there still remained the shadow of a dark suspicion upon his name. The mystery of the body found in Beech Grove was not yet explained, and no light had as yet been thrown upon it.

"Yank him up! yank him up!" yelled a dozen excited voices, and the sentiment was responded to by a chorus of assent from the crowd, now eagerly pressing forward and increasing every moment.

"Come, my lad, you've got to the end o' yer tether," said a great burly fellow in the garb of a miner, violently shaking the young man whom half a score of hands held prisoner.

"We'll give you just five minutes by the watch to say your prayers, and then you've got to say good-by to Deadwood," said another, in insolent tones.

"We're a-goin' to put a stop to this kind o' business, I tell yer—ay, if we have to hang every gambler and cut-throat in the Black Hills," savagely snarled a third.

"Five minutes! give him five minutes!" was the cry that arose on all sides. "Then yank him up!"

The victim in the clutches of the Vigilance Committee of Deadwood—a rough but honest set, whose very name struck terror to the hearts of the desperadoes of the Black Hills—was of splendid physique, with a dark but handsome face, and luxuriant curls of glossy black. He was well-dressed and gentlemanly in appearance, and in the prime of vigorous manhood; but there was a fire in his eye and a feline expression in his face that told of the passions smoldering within. In brief, it was Allan Blackmore, of Belvidere.

A shocking murder and robbery had been committed the night before, and circumstances pointed so strongly to the unfortunate man as one of the perpetrators, that before twenty-four hours had elapsed he found himself at the foot of a tree with a rope around his neck. It took barely half an hour to select a jury, try the case, and return a verdict of "Guilty." The evidence against him was purely circumstantial, but it was strong and pointed. In vain he protested his innocence, and offered explanations.

"Cut it short, Mr. Uppercrust!" sneered the leader, sarcastically. "Lawyer's gab don't count nothin' here, an' all the dust in the Black Hills can't save ye now."

"That's the chat, boys!" assented another, approvingly.

"Squar' up yer accounts, bub, an' get ready to pass in yer checks; yer is wanted on t'other side the river."

"If ye b'lieve in God, stranger, kneel down," said a third, "kneel down! We're in a hurry, an' can't wait."

The leader held up his watch in the light of the dark lantern he carried at his belt.

"Five minutes!"

The end of the rope had been thrown over one of the limbs of the tree, and some unseen hand gave it a savage jerk. Allan Blackmore now fully realized that his hour had come, and, for the first time in five years, he knelt down to pray. He was wholly innocent of the crime laid to his charge; but, oh, what a load of guilt lay heavy on his conscience.

What he sought in prayer, or whether he prayed at all, no one could tell, for neither word nor groan escaped his lips. The allotted time had scarcely elapsed before he arose to his feet, proud and defiant.

"I'll not detain you many seconds," he said, addressing the leader; "but I would consider it a great favor if you would forward this scrap of paper to the States."

Requesting a light, he took his note-book from his pocket, tore a leaf therefrom, and scribbled the following:

"MISS LILIAN.—I die for the commission of a crime of which I am entirely innocent, and trust my blood will atone for all the misery I have caused Welford and yourself. If the atonement is considered sufficient, my life is freely offered, and I die content. Bid good-by for me to my mother and sisters. That Heaven's choicest blessings may always attend you, is the last wish of

"Your unfortunate lover, ALLAN BLACKMORE."

Next morning a corpse was found dangling at the end of a rope, fastened to a tree by the road-side.

Richard Walton's health was rapidly breaking down. His eyesight began to fail; and, upon consulting an eminent physician, he was informed that there was no hope of improvement; that he was suffering from Bright's disease in an advanced stage; and that he would probably soon lose his sight altogether, and become totally blind. There was little hope of his surviving more than a year; he might not even live six months; indeed it was possible that he might die in a week.

Terribly alarmed, he consulted several others, but they invariably gave substantially the same opinion, and none held out either hope or encouragement. He returned home and waited, only to find the physician's forebodings verified, and symptom after symptom arising in succession, as predicted.

Finding his end approaching, he sent for Squire Miller, and asked him to draw up a statement, which he would sign, and to the truth of which he would make affidavit. It was a confession that he had procured the body found in Beech Grove from the dead-house of a Western hospital—that the man had died from natural causes—stroke, he was informed—and that there had been no foul play in the case. Blackmore gave him a thousand dollars for his services in procuring the body, dressing it in his (Blackmore's) clothes, and placing it where it was afterward found.

Blackmore himself inserted the knife-blade between the ribs, and through the nozzle of a small syringe injected a quantity of blood taken from his own arm, to which he added a certain amount of water. He then inserted the knife a second time, and broke off the blade.

"They'll think I committed suicide," he said, "and I shall get the insurance, and divide up."

But he failed to keep his word.

The publication of Walton's confession removed the last traces of lingering suspicion from the name of Chester Welford.

By a curious coincidence the *Belvidere Herald*, some six months afterward, contained in adjoining columns a notice of the marriage of Lilian Balsodare to Chester Welford, and the death of Richard Walton.

[THE END.]

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